

Belle Meade,
Nashville Vic., Tennessee.

HABS No. TENN-132

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Tennessee

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
CENTRAL UNIT—ST. LOUIS

Historic American Buildings Survey
J. Frazer Smith, District Officer
Goodwyn Institute Bldg., Memphis, Tenn.

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BELLE MEADE

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South side of Harding Road, mile west of Nashville, Tenn.

Physical Data

Present owner: Meredith Caldwell.

Present occupant and use: Meredith Caldwell - home.

Description (present condition)

Wall construction: Brick.

Size and form: Rectangular, with semi-detached kitchen wing.

Number stories: Two and one-half.

Front porch: Stone, quarried on place. Rear porch: Wood - with iron rosettes.

Exterior openings, windows: Sliding double sash.

Chimneys: Brick.

Interior

Trim: Greek - dog-eared.

Mantels: A few old ones plain Greek - mostly replaced.

Stairways: Excellent, 3-story elliptical, decorated with niches.

Plasterwork: Simple plaster cornices.

Additions and alterations: Kitchen connection now closed in; porte-cochere added in rear.

Outbuildings: 2-story brick privy, women upstairs, installations gone; huge brick smokehouse; large frame horse barns.

Prepared by



August 20, 1940.

Charles E. Peterson,
Senior Landscape Architect.

The Shola

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Historical Data

Year of erection: "The first mansion was burned in 1853, and the same year the present structure was built."*

Built for (first owner): General William Giles Harding (?)

Built by: "The six square stone columns across the front were quarried on the place by the slaves under General Harding's supervision, and are remarkable in that there are only two sections in each."*

Original intended use: Residence.

Notable events and occupants:

"On land grants and additional acreage acquired from the Indians in exchange for a Shetland pony and a 'shot gun per acre,' John Harding, in 1806, laid out the 'Queen of the Southern Estates,' and developed the first thoroughbred breeding establishment in America.

"John Harding, of Huguenot ancestry, came with his father, Giles Harding, and his younger brothers and sisters to Tennessee from Virginia in 1805. He cleared and fenced his Tennessee land and began the erection of a home, living in the meantime in a double log cabin which still stands on the lot adjoining. Here his son, General William Giles Harding, was born.

"Originally the estate consisted of 1,400 acres, but under General Harding's management lands were added until at the time of his death there were 5,000 acres in the Belle Meade plot inclosed in twenty miles of rock fences.

"Belle Meade's claim to international fame comes from its reputation as the greatest breeding establishment of thoroughbred horses of its time, and for being the oldest in America. It was originated by John Harding, was brought to greater perfection during the life of General William Harding, and carried on after his death by his sons-in-law, General William H. Jackson and Justice Howell E. Jackson. In 1881 the French government sent representatives to this country to inspect American thoroughbreds. Upon their return to France they reported that the finest thoroughbred stock in the United States were to be found at Belle Meade, in Nashville, Tennessee.

"In later years Theodore Roosevelt visited the master of the mansion, and together they founded the Boone-Crockett Hunting Club, to membership of which no man was eligible until he had brought down some one of the big game of America - the bear, the elk, or the buffalo.

"Andrew Jackson was a friend of the family and afrequent visitor, as was also James K. Polk. Benjamin Harrison was a guest, and Roosevelt and Taft visited there together. Grover Cleveland and his young bride spent a week-end as guests.

"William Harding was the second master of the place and in his declining years General William H. Jackson took charge of it.

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General Jackson's life was also of historic importance. A young soldier, just out of West Point, he served in the war with Mexico and on the frontier he fought against the Indians in company with Kit Carson, and La Rue, the famous French guide. Last of all, he fought for the Southern cause in the Civil War.

"On the death of General Jackson, his son, William Harding Jackson, assumed control of the property, but the young owner passed away after a brief illness and Belle Meade passed under the hammer."*

*Reference: History of Homes and Gardens of Tennessee, compiled by The Garden Study Club of Nashville, Mrs. John Trotwood Moore collaborating. Ed. by Roberta Seawell Brandau. (The Parthenon Press, Nashville, 1936.) pp.125-129.

Prepared by Ida B. Guild September 15, 1940.

Ida B. Guild

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